

To: Council
Date: 13 July 2025
Report of: Chair of the Scrutiny Committee 2025/26
Title of Report: Annual Scrutiny Report 2025/26

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To provide Council with a summary of Scrutiny activity during the 2025/2026 municipal year
Key decision:	No
Lead Member:	Councillor Alex Powell, Chair of the Scrutiny Committee 2025/26
Corporate Priority:	All
Policy Framework:	Council Strategy 2024-28

Recommendation(s): That Council resolves to:	
1.	Note the work of the Scrutiny Committee, it's Working Groups, Budget Review Group and the recommendations over the 2025/26 municipal year, as set out in the report.

Information Exempt from Publication	
N/A	N/A

Appendix No.	Appendix Title	Exempt from Publication
Appendix 1	Breakdown of Scrutiny recommendations 2025/26	No

Foreword by the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee



It has been an honour and a pleasure to chair the Scrutiny Committee across the 25/26 municipal year. This was a big year for Oxford City Council as we faced discussions both around the agreement of the new Local Plan 2042 and the preparation for Local Government Reorganisation, all of which has been happening in the context of a Minority Administration which makes the undertaking of effective scrutiny particularly important.

In my view, 2025/2026 was a highly effective year for the committee. During the course of the year, as reflected at Appendix 1, we made 84 recommendations, 51 of which were agreed with a further 16 agreed in part. As this suggests, we were able to have a concrete impact on the direction of the council. We also saw a reduction in the use of Urgent Key Decisions, which is welcome in addressing the concerns of many members of council. This includes a real impact in Leisure, Housing, and support equality and diversity.

This year, amongst the scrutiny recommendations accepted, we saw:

- Greater ambition in regard to the cycle parking standards included within Local Plan 2042
- Inclusion of support for community-led energy generation schemes within Local Plan 2042
- Ensuring that the Council's Domestic Abuse Policy for Service Users explicitly references the fear of deportation can impact the likelihood of domestic violence disclosure
- Increased publicity for the locations of public toilets across the city both online and through the use of physical signage
- Changes to council operating procedures, such as officer training, to ensure that more disabled people are included within consultation processes.
- That every document which is to be sent to consultation undergoes and inclusivity check by an officer, resident panel or elected member to ensure readability and understandability
- That when seeking to understand the Nighttime Economy, Council should adopt a broad approach that includes bookshops, museums, the covered market and other non-alcohol focused activities.
- That the City Council should engage with employers and unions within the Nighttime Economy to consider how best to support late night workers to have safe and accessible routes to travel home.
- To undertake an audit of how signage is used in areas where we currently see high levels of fly-tipping and to consider whether further signage may help to address the issue.
- That future Anti-social Behaviour Reports include anonymised details of the protective characteristics of both those making complaints of anti-social

behaviour and those who are the subject of complaints about anti-social behaviour

The above reflects the fact that we have been able to act as a critical friend to cabinet and, as is proper within the context of a minority administration, ensure that members of all political affiliation have been able to input into the policy and orientation of the council.

It was a particular pleasure to take forward scrutiny commissioned items, such as noticeboard management in the City and the Nighttime economy within Oxford City. Such items offer a real and clear opportunity for councillors from outside of the administration to input concretely into City policy.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank both the officers and members of cabinet who have given their time to support the work of the committee. Particular thanks are due to Celeste Reyeslao as Scrutiny and Governance Advisor who has provided incredible support to both the committee and me personally in chairing the committee. Her dedication, attention to detail, and guidance are a huge asset to the council. Thanks are also due to Jonathan Malton who has stepped in to support the committee, particularly in relation to special meeting convened to consider LGR and the consideration of the Local Plan 2045.

Many other officers also gave their time to come to committee and answer what were, at times, very large numbers of questions from members. Although, I cannot name everyone here I hope they will accept my thanks and are aware of the value that members of the committee put on them giving up their time, especially in the evening, to come and discuss their work with us.

I am delighted to have been re-elected as Scrutiny Committee chair for 26/27—which I am advised makes me the first two term scrutiny chair in at least 5 years—and am looking forward to carrying on the effective work that we have undertaken over the last year.

Councillor Alex Powell
Chair of the Scrutiny Committee 2025-26, Oxford City Council

Introduction

1. This report provides a summary of activities undertaken by Council's Scrutiny function during the 2025/26 municipal year. It reflects on the work carried out by the Committee and its Working Groups and offers a forward look at its priorities for the coming year.

Overview of structure and function

2. Scrutiny at Oxford City Council operates through the overarching Scrutiny Committee, supplemented by three standing Working Groups: Finance and Performance, Housing and Homelessness, and Climate and Environment. Each working group was given the responsibility to undertake detailed review of decisions and issues relevant to their remit, with the Finance and Performance Working Group also taking on the review of the performance of the Council's companies.
3. The Scrutiny Committee was comprised of 12 cross-party, non-executive Members, reflecting the political composition of the Council. It was chaired by Councillor Alex Powell.
4. The Working Groups were structured to include one seat from each political group, although not all political groups chose to take up their seat.
5. The 2025/26 Scrutiny and Working Group memberships were as follows:

Scrutiny Committee Cllr Alex Powell (Chair) Cllr Mike Rowley (Vice-Chair) Cllr Mohammed Altaf-Khan Cllr Mohammed Azad Cllr Tiago Corais Cllr Chris Jarvis Cllr Dr Amar Latif Cllr Katherine Miles Cllr Edward Mundy - <i>until January 2026</i> Cllr Simon Ottino Cllr Asima Qayyum Cllr Anne Stares Cllr James Taylor - <i>from January 2026</i>	Finance and Performance Working Group Cllr James Fry (Chair) Cllr Chris Jarvis Cllr Dr Christopher Smowton Cllr Ian Yeatman
	Housing and Homelessness Working Group Cllr Theodore Jupp (Chair) Cllr Lizzie Diggins Cllr Edward Mundy - <i>until January 2026</i> Cllr Rosie Rawle Cllr Anne Stares
	Climate and Environment Working Group Cllr Katherine Miles (Chair) Cllr Judith Harley Cllr Jemima Hunt Cllr Kate Robinson

6. In January 2026, Scrutiny's membership was revised following changes to the Council's political composition and proportionality. Councillor Edward Mundy

stepped down from the Committee and the Housing and Homelessness Working Group. Councillor James Taylor was then appointed as a Scrutiny Committee member from January 2026 to the end of the council year to maintain proportional balance.

7. The Committee's work balanced between consideration of Cabinet reports and commissioned items, with the aim to contribute ideas and evidence to policy development, holding decision-makers to account, and support the continual improvement of Council services.

Summary of activities

8. During 2025/26, the Scrutiny Committee held 12 meetings (11 ordinary meetings and 1 special meeting). The Working Groups collectively held 15 meetings (5 meetings of the Finance and Performance Working Group, 5 meetings of the Housing and Homelessness Working Group, and 5 meetings of the Climate and Environment Working Group).
9. The Committee and its Working Groups collectively made a total of **84 recommendations** to Cabinet. Of which, 51 were agreed, 16 agreed in-part, and 7 were not agreed. Cabinet did not indicate its position on 10 recommendations, providing only written commentaries.
10. Whilst not all recommendations were agreed, the Committee believe they formed a constructive part of the policy and decision-making process, and provided opportunities for the function to influence Council decisions in a meaningful way. A breakdown of Scrutiny recommendations and whether they were agreed, agreed in part, or not agreed is supplied as Appendix 1.
11. Scrutiny covered a broad range of issues this year, reflecting both its statutory responsibilities and wider areas:
 - **The Scrutiny Committee** had constructive engagements with More Leisure as it monitored the Council's leisure programme and service plan for the year. It commissioned a review of Oxford's current tourism offer understanding the role of the Advance Business Improvement District (ABID), and created discussions on how the city's nighttime economy could be improved and be more inclusive. Following the withdrawal of the Oxford Local Plan 2040 in the previous year, Scrutiny tracked and examined the development of the 2045 Plan through to the draft submission stage. It scrutinised the Oxpens River Bridge project raising important questions around financial and legal risks. Scrutiny also considered matters relating to equality and inclusivity within the Council's workforce, Council's engagement with citizens and communities, and the work surrounding anti-social behaviour and safeguarding within the city, alongside many of its other work this year.
 - **The Housing and Homelessness Working Group** focused largely on ensuring the Council's housing services remain aligned with evolving standards arising from significant changes in government policies and regulatory requirements. It reviewed the Council's efforts to reduce homelessness and rough sleeping, reviewing the use of temporary accommodation and measures to meet rising demand, including the

introduction of a new face-to-face contact centre, and challenged the performance against length-of-stay standards. The Working Group also considered the Selective Licensing Scheme in its third year, monitored the Council's performance as a landlord and looked into the condition and management of the HRA stock.

- **The Climate and Environment Working Group** was consistent in monitoring the Council's net zero aims and climate resilience objectives, including the review of the Air Quality action plan, progress of carbon reduction measures particularly the District Heat Network project, and the development of infrastructure to support the transition to electric vehicles and wider sustainable energy initiatives.
 - **The Finance and Performance Working Group** provided ongoing oversight of the Council's financial position and strategic planning, including a review of the Council's commercial properties. It also reviewed the performance of the Council's wholly-owned companies Oxford City Housing Limited, Oxford Direct Services Limited and Oxford Direct Services Trading Limited. The Working Group also reviewed OxWED's Delivery Strategy for Oxpens, a joint venture with between the Council and Nuffield College.
12. In November 2025, Scrutiny Committee convened for a special meeting to consider the Council's Three Unitary Authorities (3UA) proposal for the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), alongside the single unitary and 2 unitary proposals for Oxfordshire, ultimately recommending the 3UA as the most balanced, and community-focused approach for Oxford.
13. No executive or delegated key decisions were called in by Scrutiny during this year.
14. The **Budget Review Group** was re-established to conduct the annual examination of the Council's budget proposals for 2026/27. The Group met 5 times between December and January, reviewing a range of evidence from the Corporate Leadership Team and Cabinet Members. The work of the Budget Review Group concluded with the submission of a report containing 10 recommendations to Cabinet. The report was formally presented to Council on 23 February 2026.
15. Further to this, Scrutiny Committee and the Finance and Performance Working Group made a combined 6 recommendations to the Shareholder and Joint Venture Group in relation to various businesses of the Council's Companies.

Reflections and looking ahead

16. Scrutiny's work this year reflected a balanced approach to bettering council services for residents whilst remaining mindful of the challenges and opportunities presented by LGR, and the future authority which will be responsible for delivering services in Oxford. Its reviews brought light to issues that directly affect the local public such as those relating to fly-tipping, waste collection, the management of streets and watercourses, as well as the city's leisure, tourism and nighttime economy offer. Across its programme, Scrutiny provided a constructive space for challenge and debate helping to identify

opportunities for improvement and contribute to the Council's ambition to make Oxford a better place to live, work and visit.

17. In the year ahead, Scrutiny will aim to have stronger focus on issues of direct relevance to residents whilst keeping an outlook on the challenges, opportunities, and risks arising from LGR. It will continue to monitor the delivery of the Council's key priorities particularly in relation to housing and homelessness, environmental sustainability, and the setting of the annual budget and Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) amidst a period of significant change to the local authority.

Acknowledgements

18. The Scrutiny Committee and its Working Groups extend its thanks to all Cabinet Members, Council officers, external witnesses, and members of the public who contributed to scrutiny work this year, and look forward to continued, meaningful collaboration in 2026/27.

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